

President Obama's Budget Proposal Includes Small Cuts in AFG and SAFER - Major Restructuring of Other State and Local Grant Programs

Tuesday, February 28, 2012

This month President Obama released his FY 2013 budget request to Congress. His Department of Homeland Security proposed budget provides a total of \$2.9 billion for FEMA state and local grant programs, a \$500 million increase from FY 2012 appropriation levels. Of this \$ 2.9 billion, \$670 million would go to firefighter assistance grants: \$335 million for the Assistance to Firefighters (AFG) program and \$335 million for SAFER a modest \$2.5 million cut for each program.

The President also proposed creation of a new National Preparedness Grant Program that would have two parts: 1) a formula program distributing funds to states and some Urban Area Security Initiative activities, and 2) a competitive program to states and regions for specific policy areas including critical infrastructure, counterterrorism, and transportation. Programs such as State Homeland Security Grants, Urban Area Security Initiative Grants, Transportation and Infrastructure Protection-Rail-Port-Bus, Operation Stonegarden, Metropolitan Medical Response System/Medical Surge Grants, REAL ID Implementation Grants, and Citizen Corps would be eliminated and folded into the National Preparedness Grant program. It is important to note that this restructuring would require separate authorization legislation.

The President's budget proposal also includes \$350 million for Emergency Management Performance Grants.

Separate from the FEMA Grant Programs, The President proposed \$1 billion for a First Responder Stabilization Fund, which would be used to retain, hire or rehire new firefighters. This provision reflects the President's earlier jobs creation proposals.

The National Fire Administration's budget would be cut by \$1.52 million, leaving its overall FY 2013 budget at \$42.52 million.

Senate to Consider FIRE-SAFER Reauthorization

An amendment to S. 1813 includes the language that allows state fire training agencies participate in the AFG program.

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Senator Joe Lieberman (ID-Conn.) and Senator Susan Collins (R-Maine) are expected to offer an amendment to S. 1813, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act, which will reauthorize the FIRE and SAFER grant programs from Fiscal Year 2013 to Fiscal Year 2017.

The amendment is based on a compromise proposal drafted by the major fire service organizations, and includes the following changes to the programs:

- Ensures a fairer distribution of FIRE grant funding by setting aside 25 percent of appropriated funds to each category: career, volunteer and combination fire departments.
- Allocates 10 percent of the appropriated funds to the Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) grant program.
- Establishes economic hardship waivers for FIRE and SAFER local matching requirements.
- Increases the maximum size of a FIRE grant based on the population served by a department, allowing up to \$9 million for jurisdictions that serve populations more than 2.5 million people.
- Establishes fire-safety research centers to conduct dedicated research to improve firefighter health and safety.

The amendment also would revise the requirements for the SAFER grant program by removing the \$100,000 cap on a SAFER-funded firefighter. It would change the SAFER grant programs to require a 3-year period of performance with a 25%-25%-70% local match requirement and there would be no requirement that a fire department maintain a SAFER-funded firefighter after the third year.